

of links between Iraq and al Qaeda members, including "solid evidence" that members of the terrorist network maintain a presence in Iraq.

The facts are much less conclusive. Officials said Rumsfeld's statement was based in part on intercepted telephone calls in which an al Qaeda member who apparently was passing through Baghdad was overheard calling friends or relatives, intelligence officials said.

The intercepts provide no evidence that the suspected terrorist was working with the Iraqi regime or that he was working on a terrorist operation while he was in Iraq, they said.

In his Monday night speech, President Bush said a senior al Qaeda leader received medical treatment in Baghdad this year—implying larger cooperation—but he offered no evidence of complicity in any plot between the terrorist and Hussein's regime.

Rumsfeld also suggested that the Iraqi regime has offered safe haven to bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar.

While technically true, that too is misleading. Intelligence reports said the Iraqi ambassador to Turkey, a longtime intelligence officer, made the offer during a visit to Afghanistan in late 1998, after the United States attacked al Qaeda training camps with cruise missiles to retaliate for the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. But officials said the same intelligence reports said bin Laden rejected the offer because he didn't want Hussein to control his group.

NO IRONCLAD PROOF

In fact, the officials said, there's no ironclad evidence that the Iraqi regime and the terrorist network are working together, or that Hussein has ever contemplated giving chemical or biological weapons to al Qaeda, with whom he has deep ideological differences.

None of the dissenting officials, who work in a number of different agencies, would agree to speak publicly. But many of them have long experience in the Middle East and South Asia, and all spoke in similar terms about their unease with the way that U.S. political leaders are dealing with Iraq.

All agreed that Hussein is a threat who eventually must be dealt with, and none flatly opposes military action. But, they say, the U.S. government has no dramatic new knowledge about the Iraqi leader that justifies Bush's urgent call to arms.

"I've seen nothing that's compelling," said one military officer who has access to intelligence reports.

Some lawmakers have voiced similar concerns after receiving CIA briefings.

Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., said some information he had seen did not support Bush's portrayal of the Iraqi threat.

"It's troubling to have classified information that contradicts statements made by the administration," Durbin said, "There's more they should share with the public."

Florida's Sen. Bob Graham, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, last week expressed frustration with the information he was receiving from the CIA and questioned the need to elevate Iraq to "our No. 1 threat."

In his Monday night speech, Bush stressed that if Hussein gained control of radioactive material no bigger than "a softball" he could build a nuclear weapon sufficient to intimidate his region, blackmail the world and covertly arm terrorists. But a senior administration intelligence official notes that Hussein has sought such highly enriched uranium for many years without success, and there is no evidence that he has it now.

Moreover, the senior official said, Hussein has no way to deliver a nuclear weapon against a U.S. target.

"Give them a nuclear weapon and you have the problem of delivery. Give them delivery, even clandestine, and you have a problem of plausible denial. Does anyone think that a nuclear weapon detonating in a Ryder truck or tramp freighter would not automatically trigger a response that would include Iraq, Iran, North Korea?" the intelligence official asked.

Here are some other examples of questionable statements:

Vice President Dick Cheney said in late August that Iraq might have nuclear weapons "fairly soon."

A CIA report released Friday said it could take Iraq until the last half of the decade to produce a nuclear weapon, unless it could acquire bomb-grade uranium of plutonium on the black market.

Also in August, Rumsfeld suggested that al Qaeda operatives fleeing Afghanistan were taking refuge in Iraq with Hussein's assistance.

Rumsfeld apparently was referring to about 150 members of the militant Islamic group Ansar al Islam (Supporters of Islam) who have taken refuge in Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. One of America's would-be Kurdish allies controls that part of the country, however, not Hussein.

WALKOVER NOTION

Current and former military officers also question the view sometimes expressed by Cheney, Rumsfeld and their civilian advisors in and out of the U.S. government that an American-led campaign against the Iraqi military would be a walkover.

"It is an article of faith among those with no military experience that the Iraqi military is low-hanging fruit," one intelligence officer said.

He challenged that notion, citing the U.S. experience in Somalia, where militiamen took thousands of casualties in 1993 but still managed to kill U.S. soldiers and force an American withdrawal.

Iraqi commanders, some officials warned, also could unleash chemical or biological weapons—although the American military is warning them they could face war crimes charges if they do—or U.S. airstrikes could do so inadvertently.

Hussein also might try to strike Israel or Saudi Arabia with Scud missiles tipped with chemical or biological weapons.

Mr. Speaker, the Herald story states, and I am quoting now, "that a growing number of military officers, intelligence professionals and diplomats within the administration have deep misgivings about the march toward war." The story continues, and again I am quoting from the Miami Herald, "These officials charge that the administration hawks have exaggerated evidence of the threat that the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein poses, including distorting his links to the al Qaeda terrorist network. They have overstated the extent of international support for attacking Iraq and have downplayed the potential repercussions of a new war in the Middle East. They charge that the administration squelches dissenting views and that intelligence analysts are under intense pressure to produce reports supporting the White House's arguments that Hussein poses such an immediate threat to the United States that preemptive military action is necessary. 'Analysts at the working level in the intelligence community are feeling very strong pressure

from the Pentagon to cook the intelligence books,' said one official speaking on the condition of anonymity."

The article goes on to note that, again, I am quoting, "a dozen officials echoed his views."

Now today's Washington Post discusses what it calls a "behind-the-scenes battle over Iraq-related intelligence." And, again, I am quoting: "The CIA's detailed, unvarnished view of the threat posed by Iraq is central, say many lawmakers, as to how they will vote on the matter. Yet, increasing numbers of intelligence officials, including former and current intelligence agency employees are concerned the agency is tailoring its public stance to fit the administration's views."

The article goes on to quote a former head of counterterrorism of the CIA, one Vincent Cannistraro, who says that "there is a tremendous amount of pressure on the CIA to substantiate positions that have already been adopted by the administration."

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that if these reports are accurate, they represent a dangerous state of affairs. When we began our debate on this resolution yesterday morning, we did not have the benefit of declassified intelligence estimates released only last night, which indicate that Saddam Hussein is unlikely to initiate a chemical or biological attack against the United States unless he concludes that a U.S.-led attack is inevitable. Such contradictions between classified information in the administration's public statements make it very difficult for Congress to have a meaningful debate. It puts those few Members of Congress who have access to this information as members of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence in a truly awkward position and leaves the rest of us and the American people in the dark.

Senator GRAHAM, who chairs the Senate Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, has said that the classified information he has received does not tally with the public statements of the administration. But, of course, he is not permitted to explain why. Based on what he knows, he has described the focus on Iraq as a distraction from the war on terrorism that allows Syria and Iran, countries which should be at the forefront of any intelligence effort against state sponsors of terrorism, off the hook.

Let me conclude by saying that we cannot discharge our constitutional responsibilities by allowing the administration to control the flow of information and simply trusting that they know what they are doing. That is an unacceptable situation in a democracy, Mr. Speaker. And that is not what the founders had in mind when they gave Congress, not the President, the power to declare war.

Mr. Speaker, what is the responsibility of a great power? Sometimes it is to act when others cannot, or will not, do so. Sometimes it is to refrain from acting when others would, so